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ABSTRACT

Noting that reports by the National Research Council and the National Reading Panel show that children learn to read best if they are first provided with an understanding that sounds heard in spoken words correspond to letters seen in print, this issue of the "State Education Leader" newsletter explains that once this skill is acquired, children should then be taught the letter-sound relationships of traditional phonics while being consistently exposed to literature. The newsletter thus proposes that states now need to develop the capacity to translate this research into sound public policy. It notes that policymakers will need the following three tools: access to information and data on literacy programs across the country; a model policy framework to help policymakers select the best policy options for their particular state environment; and a means of mobilizing key education leaders and policymakers to develop the most workable and realistic policies for each state. The newsletter also lists the five key questions addressed by the Education Commission of the States' Model Literacy Policy Template; unveils a new nationwide literacy database; explains how reading failure is a public health concern; and outlines situations in Idaho, Alabama, and Texas. (PM)

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ED 468 904

"Leading for Literacy": From Research to Policy

Sherry Freeland Walker, Editor

State Education Leader
v20 n2 Spr-Sum 2002

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STATE EDUCATION

Education Commission of the States

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 2 SPRING-SUMMER 2002

The mission of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) is to help state leaders identify, develop and implement public policy for education that addresses current and future needs of a learning society.

By Kenny Guinn

"LEADING FOR LITERACY": FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY

A recent study of literacy in the American South found that, contrary to commonly held historical belief, a large percentage – more than 80% – of southern whites and free blacks in the early 19th Century learned to read, and that some 10% of slaves could read as well. These findings are significant when one considers that, prior to the Civil War, public schools did not exist in the South, and only a small percentage of southern families could afford to send their children to any of the private schools available. And, while the 10% literacy rate for slaves may at first glance seem unimpressive, this statistic takes on an entirely new meaning when one understands that, after the 1830s, laws prohibited slaves from learning how to read.

Such findings provide us with two valuable lessons. First, human beings are endowed with a tremendous capacity to learn despite the most difficult of circumstances. Second, we can and must be more effective at ensuring this capacity is nurtured and supported. If significant numbers of citizens could learn to read in the absence of public support, then it is not unrealistic to expect that in today's society all children should be able to read by the end of 3rd grade.

Unfortunately, while our society now devotes substantial resources to provide an education for all children, the most recent national student assessment found that only 8% of 4th-

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ECS 2001-02 Chairman Kenny Guinn, governor of Nevada

grade students are reading at the highest level of performance, and only 32% are at or above the "proficient" level in reading. What makes these modern statistics truly sobering is that, unlike the 19th Century South whose rural economy did not demand the ability to read as a precursor to success, we now live in an age where knowledge and the development of advanced technical skills are absolutely critical. In today's world, where almost half the adults at the lowest level of literacy also live in poverty, literacy is a prerequisite to success both for individuals and for society.

The good news is that the groundwork for success in improving literacy is already in place. In just the last three years, seminal reports have been produced by the National Research Council and the National Reading Panel, both composed of leading scientists, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, education administrators and parents (see pages 8 and 9). These reports found that children learn to read best if they are first provided with an understanding that sounds heard in spoken words correspond to letters seen in print. Once this skill is acquired, children should then be taught the letter-sound relationships of traditional phonics while being consistently exposed to literature and interesting books.

Policy tools

Since research now provides answers to the crucial questions surrounding reading instruction, what states need now, more than ever, is to develop the capacity to translate this research into sound public policy. To help guide this policy development, policymakers will need three main tools:

1. Access to information and data on literacy programs from across the country.
2. A model policy framework to help policymakers select the best policy options possible for their particular state environment.
3. A means of mobilizing key education leaders and policymakers to develop the most workable and realistic policies for each state.

Over the past year, I focused my tenure as ECS chairman on developing each of these three tools. Our goal is to help states design and develop policies and practices to teach every child to read at a proficient level by the end of 3rd grade.

Database

To provide access to comprehensive information on literacy programs from across the country, ECS developed a Web-based literacy database that includes reading program information from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Virgin Islands (see page 4). It is hoped that policymakers will use this new resource to study and compare reading programs to learn from the experiences of other states and to generate new ideas for developing unique policies of their own.

Literacy Web site

With the help of a sponsorship from Voyager Expanded Learning, ECS also has developed a new reading/literacy Web site (located at www.ecs.org/reading). The site provides instant access to some of the latest research on reading and literacy, as well as links to information on promising new reading programs and practices from across the country. Also provided are links to the most recent domestic and international assessments of student reading ability.

Model policies

The information contained in the new ECS literacy database and reading Web site will be instrumental for policymakers to make full use of the model literacy policy framework that ECS also worked to develop over the past year. To create this framework, ECS assembled an advisory council comprising noted national reading and literacy experts. This group developed a template to help answer a set of five key questions policymakers will face in creating new literacy programs. Most important, the group identified five key "driving principles"

Five Key Questions Addressed by the ECS Model Literacy Policy Template:

1. What principles should provide the foundation for comprehensive state policy to improve reading?
2. Where are policies consistent with principles in place and operating?
3. What major questions should be addressed in my evaluation of the adequacy of the policies and programs in place in my state?
4. Once adopted and implemented, what kind of reasonable indicators of progress can be used to assess the effectiveness of the policy?
5. What resources are available to help me answer these questions? How can I access them?

that must be contained in any comprehensive literacy policy. Those principles are:

1. All reading programs, federally funded or not, must be based on scientific evidence of their effectiveness.

2. State standards and assessments must match the essential components in the revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act, *No Child Left Behind*, with the goal of 4th-grade reading "proficiency" as defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

3. States need an assessment capability that is frequent and comprehensive enough to screen, diagnose and inform early intervention; predicts reading proficiency; and provides information to parents, educators and the community on the degree of student, school, teacher, district and state success.

4. States need data management systems that provide data which can be disaggregated; produce flexible, customized reports; and minimize teacher recordkeeping burdens.

5. Teachers, principals and other education personnel must master the knowledge, skills and practices that result in early reading proficiency, and preservice and inservice educator programs must be held accountable for achieving these results.

Members of the ECS Literacy Advisory Council

Jane Fung, TNPI MetLife Fellow, Los Angeles Unified School District

Milton Goldberg, ECS Distinguished Senior Fellow, senior advisor to the National Alliance of Business

G. Reid Lyon, chief, Child Development and Behavior Branch, National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development

Elridge McMillan, scholar-in-residence/education consultant, Atlanta Metropolitan College

Katherine Mitchell, director, Alabama Reading Initiative

Ted Sanders, president, ECS

Thomas Upchurch, president, Georgia Partnership

Sharon Vaughn, Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts

The model policy template will be an indispensable tool. First, it takes advantage of the best thinking on literacy program development from the nation's premier reading experts. It also will help states as they work to implement *No Child Left Behind*, because the act and the template contain similar requirements – including the requirement that states adopt "scientifically based" reading programs. The template also offers a series of progress indicators that can be used to determine if policies are headed in the right direction.

Mobilizing action

Over the coming year, ECS will continue its work to help states develop sound literacy policies. While the past 12 months were spent developing the literacy database and model policy template, ECS now will move toward mobilizing action to develop the best literacy policies possible for each state. I am proud to announce that Nevada will take the lead in this effort by convening a state summit this fall of key education leaders and policymakers. The summit will be designed to spread the word on what the research tells us about teaching reading and to to familiarize leaders with the tools ECS has produced to develop sound state literacy policy. Together, I believe we can make great strides toward ensuring that every state has a comprehensive program in place to promote universal literacy by the end of 3rd grade.

Guinn is governor of Nevada and 2001-02 ECS chairman.

> "ECS now will move toward mobilizing action to develop the best literacy policies possible for each state."

Education Commission of the States

ECS Tools & Resources
State Literacy Programs Database

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Welcome to the Education Commission of the States' Online Interactive Literacy Programs Database. Here you will find 50-state comparison information on state-supported literacy efforts.

State Profiles	A report containing all information available in the Literacy Programs Database for a single state.
State Comparisons	Comparative information on one or more states to be displayed in a single online report.
50-State Reports	Information on individual topics (funding, program components, more) from all 50 states and four territories.

This database was prepared by the Education Commission of the States' (ECS) Early Learning Initiative and the ECS Clearinghouse, under the leadership of Jessica McMaken and Jennifer Dounay. The database was produced under the auspices of the State Education Policy Network, a partnership of ECS, the Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Leaders Council, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Conference of State Legislatures and National Governors Association with funding from a U.S. Department of Education grant (R215U010020). Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education or the respective organizations.

ECS UNVEILS
NEW NATIONWIDE LITERACY DATABASE

To provide access to comprehensive information on literacy programs from across the country, ECS has created a Web-based literacy database that includes reading program information from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Virgin Islands. This database can generate individual or state-by-state comparisons of literacy programs as reflected in state legislation, executive orders and governors initiatives, state activities under the federal Reading Excellence Act, state board of education regulations and state department of education initiatives.

The database also allows for comparison of six key state reading program components, including:

1. Teaching
2. School leadership
3. Assessment
4. Standards
5. Reading curriculum guidelines
6. Parental involvement.

When users enter the database site on the ECS Web site (www.ecs.org/issues/reading, then "Tools and Resources" on the bottom right-hand side), they are presented with three main options for searching, including: (1) a "state profiles" button that leads users to all the information available for a single state, including literacy program descriptions, funding sources, intended program target populations and direct links to the state policies or associated Web sites; (2) a "state comparisons" button that generates reports comparing multiple states selected by the user; and (3) a button that provides access to "50-state reports" comparing state literacy programs using the six key state reading components listed above.

Visit the ECS literacy database at www.ecs.org/LiteracyDatabase.○

HELPING DISTRICTS IMPLEMENT RESEARCH-BASED READING INSTRUCTION

By Dale DeCesare

The recently passed *No Child Left Behind Act* authorizes a total of $975 million for two literacy initiatives – Early Reading First for preschool-age children and Reading First for grades K-3. The initiatives are aimed at having all children achieve reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

Both are voluntary programs that require states and school districts to use "scientifically based reading research" to improve reading instruction. This research-based component gives state policymakers a chance to establish a new approach to improving literacy for all children.

Research focus

The time is ripe for such a new approach. Although researchers have identified the essential components of reading instruction (see box), most states do not require districts or schools to explicitly use "research-based" reading programs. At least half of the states encourage the use of research-based curricula and instructional strategies, but in most cases such guidelines apply to only a limited number of reading programs and are not universally applied to all districts and schools. And little more than one-third of the states use research-based reading strategies as part of their teacher preparation and/or professional development initiatives.

Reading First and Early Reading First present a significant opportunity for states to expand, coordinate and, in some cases, initiate, research-based reading programs. To take advantage of this opportunity, however, state policymakers must work together with local school district personnel. Such cooperation is essential because the vast majority of funds for the two reading programs will be awarded to school districts.

Policymaker questions

As outlined in a new literacy policy template that ECS is developing, there are several key questions policymakers will face in creating new literacy programs. With regard to the requirement that reading programs be based on research, state policymakers will need to consider at least three major questions:

- How can they determine if reading programs are based on appropriate research?
- What mechanism will be established to help school districts implement research-based programs?
- How can districts be monitored to ensure they are doing a good job of running research-based reading programs?

To answer these questions, policymakers will want to consider a variety of policy options. For example, state policymakers might decide that either the state board of education, the chief state school officer or a broad-based committee of professionals and citizens should be responsible for establishing criteria for what constitutes an acceptable research-based reading program.

Similarly, policymakers will need to choose from a number of policy alternatives to provide assistance to school districts and determine the best way of monitoring local reading programs. By working closely with local officials, it should be possible to craft the types of policies that help ensure the research-based reading instruction requirements in the *No Child Left Behind Act* are implemented as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Some material in this article is drawn from the ECS No Child Left Behind Policy Brief *on literacy by Kristie Kauerz (www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/35/66/3566.pdf). For more information on children's literacy, see the ECS Education Issues Site on reading at www.ecs.org/issues/reading.*

DeCesare is an ECS writer/editor.

Five Essential Components of Reading Instruction

1. ***Phonemic awareness*** – the ability to hear, identify and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words
2. ***Phonics*** – the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between sounds and the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language
3. ***Vocabulary development***
4. ***Reading fluency, including oral reading skills*** – the ability to read text accurately and quickly, providing a bridge between word recognition and comprehension
5. ***Reading comprehension strategies***

Source: Report of the National Reading Panel, Teaching Children To Read, *2000.*

READING FAILURE: A PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

Editor's note: The following is extracted from testimony presented last year to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Education Reform, Committee on Education and the Workforce, by G. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health (NICHD).

"Difficulty in learning to read crushes the excitement and love for learning, which most children have when they enter school."

NICHD considers that teaching and learning in today's schools reflect not only significant education concerns but public health concerns as well. Our research has consistently shown that if children do not learn to understand and use language, to read and write, to calculate and reason mathematically, to solve problems, and to communicate their ideas and perspectives, their opportunities for a fulfilling and rewarding life are seriously compromised. Specifically, in our NICHD-supported longitudinal studies, we have learned that school failure has devastating consequences with respect to self-esteem, social development, and opportunities for advanced education and meaningful employment. Nowhere are these consequences more apparent than when children fail to learn to read.

Simply stated, the development of reading skills serves as THE major foundational academic ability for all school-based learning. Without the ability to read, the opportunities for academic and occupational success are limited indeed. Moreover, difficulty in learning to read crushes the excitement and love for learning, which most children have when they enter school.

By the end of 1st grade, children having difficulty learning to read begin to feel less positive about themselves than when they started school. As we follow children through elementary and middle school years, self-esteem and the motivation to learn to read decline even further. In the majority of cases, the students are deprived of the ability to learn about literature, science, mathematics, history and social studies because they cannot read grade-level textbooks.

By middle school, children who read well read at least 10 million words during the school year. On the other hand, children with reading difficulties read fewer than 100,000 words during the same period. Poor readers lag far behind in vocabulary development and in the acquisition of strategies for understanding what they read, and they frequently avoid reading and other assignments that require reading. By high school, the potential of these students to enter college has decreased substantially.

How does reading develop, and why do so many children have difficulty learning to read? Converging scientific evidence indicates that learning to read is a relatively lengthy process that begins very early in development and clearly before children enter formal schooling. Children who receive stimulating oral language and literacy experiences from birth onward appear to have an edge when it comes to vocabulary development, developing a general awareness of print and literacy concepts, and the goals of reading.

The experiences, however, that help develop vocabulary and general language and conceptual skills in preschoolers are different from the experiences that develop specific types of knowledge necessary to read, including knowledge about print, phonemic awareness and spelling. These skills need to be explicitly taught. While the fundamental purpose of reading is to derive meaning from print, the key to comprehension starts with the rapid and accurate reading of words. In fact, difficulties in decoding unfamiliar words and learning to recognize words rapidly are at the core of most reading difficulties. These difficulties can be traced systematically to initial difficulties in understanding that the language heard by the ear is actually composed of smaller segments of sound (e.g., phonemic awareness).

And here we come full circle – many of these early difficulties in developing phonemic awareness are due to a lack of literacy and oral language interactions with adults during infancy and early childhood. Thus, because the

environments most bereft of these interactions are those characterized by poverty, the cycle continues.

Can children with reading problems overcome their difficulties? Yes, the majority of children who enter kindergarten and elementary school at risk for reading failure can learn to read at average or above levels, but only if they are identified early and provided with systematic, explicit and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies. Failure to develop basic reading skills by age 9 predicts a lifetime of illiteracy. Unless these children receive the appropriate instruction, over 70% of the children entering 1st grade who are at risk for reading failure will continue to have reading problems into adulthood.

On the other hand, the early identification of children at risk for reading failure, coupled with the provision of comprehensive early reading interventions, can reduce the percentage of children reading below the basic level in the 4th grade (38%) to 6% or less.

Are certain early intervention approaches more effective than others? Yes. On the basis of a thorough evidence-based review of the reading research literature that met rigorous scientific standards, the National Reading Panel, convened by the NICHD and the Department of Education, found that intervention programs that provided systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, guided repeated reading to improve reading fluency, and direct instruction in vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies were significantly more effective than approaches that were less explicit and less focused on the reading skills to be taught (e.g., approaches that emphasize incidental learning of basic reading skills).

Will proper reading instruction reduce the need for special education? At least 20 million school-age children suffer from reading failure. Of these, only approximately 2.3 million are served in special education under the category of learning disabilities. By putting in place well-designed evidence-based early identification, prevention and early intervention programs in our public schools, our data strongly show that the 20 million children today suffering from reading failure could be reduced by approximately two-thirds. While still a totally unacceptable rate of reading failure, such a reduction would allow us to provide services to the children who are in genuine need of special education services with substantially greater focus and intensity.○

> “Failure to develop basic reading skills by age 9 predicts a lifetime of illiteracy.”

Also from Reid Lyon's testimony to Congress:

The education and public health consequences of reading failure are dire.

- Thirty-eight percent of 4th graders nationally cannot read at a basic level – that is, they cannot read and understand a short paragraph of the type one would find in a simple children's book.
- Reading failure is disproportionately prevalent among children living in poverty: in many low-income urban school districts, the percentage of students in the 4th grade who cannot read at basic level approaches 70%.
- The average middle-class child is exposed to approximately 500,000 words by kindergarten; an economically disadvantaged child is exposed to half as many, at best.
- Of the 10-15% of children who eventually drop out of school, over 75% report difficulties learning to read.
- Only 2% of students receiving special or compensatory education for difficulties learning to read complete a four-year college program.
- Surveys of adolescents and young adults with criminal records indicate that at least half have reading difficulties, and in some states the size of prisons a decade in the future is predicted by 4th-grade reading failure rates.
- Approximately half of children and adolescents with a history of substance abuse have reading problems.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
National Research Council, 1998

Report	The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children examined 850 research studies to determine the effectiveness of interventions used for young children experiencing problems in learning to read. (http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/prdyc)
Reading Program Components	To prevent reading difficulties, children should be provided with opportunities to: o Explore the uses and functions of written language and to develop appreciation and command of them o Grasp and master use of the alphabetic principle for reading and writing o Develop and enhance language and cognitive skills needed to understand printed texts o Experience contexts that promote enthusiasm and success in learning to read and write, as well as learning by reading and w.iting o Be identified, if needed, as having reading difficulties and participate in effective prevention and intervention programs.
Instructional Techniques/ Teacher Training	**The Federal Government:** o Provide continued assessment of the results of federal education laws that provide for equitable educational opportunities for young children o Coordinate with and share state education reform initiatives o Promote the stimulation and support of research and collaboration o Disseminate information and reward good practices. **States:** o Develop curriculum standards to help ensure educational equity o Oversee teacher preparation and licensing agencies o Influence the availability of quality preschool and day care environments, and support libraries and new technologies. **Districts:** o Provide structures and resources that interpret policy initiatives for schools and classrooms o Provide teachers with support needed to ensure effective teaching of reading o Employ special service providers who have responsibilities and expertise for supporting children in need of special instruction, prevention or intervention due to reading difficulties.
Policy Implications	1. States should set standards aligned with findings on how children learn to read. 2. State oversight of teacher preservice education should assure that institutions meet recognized criteria for reading education for new teachers. 3. Teacher licensing requirements should require knowledge in reading-related areas. 4. States should promote a systematic and widespread public education campaign to promote public understanding of early literacy development. 5. Public authorities and education professionals should provide research-based guidelines to help parents, pediatricians and preschool professionals identify children with hearing or language impairment, or children who lack age-appropriate literacy skills. 6. Federal, state and local authorities should strive to provide all children with access to early childhood environments that address reading risk factors. 7. Professional development opportunities should be provided to help teachers keep up with changes in the reading knowledge base and to develop improved instructional strategies. 8. State and local leaders should provide resources needed to meet students' needs such as reading specialists and quality instructional materials. 9. School scheduling should allow for additional time focused on reading instruction. 10. Private/public partnerships should be developed to support reading program and research. 11. Government agencies and private foundations should sponsor research in areas such as effectiveness of preschool and primary school interventions, and the use of technology and software in supporting reading instruction.

Teaching Children To Read
National Reading Panel, 2000

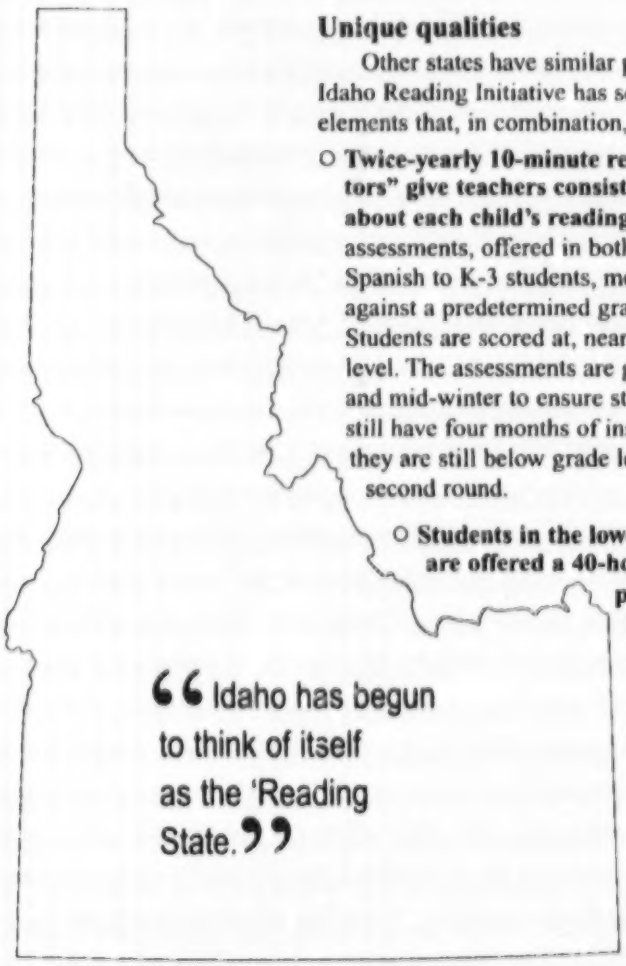
Report	Leading scientists in reading research, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, education administrators and parents examined about 400 research studies on how children learn to read. (http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.htm)
Reading Program Components	A comprehensive reading program should include the following components: o Phonemic awareness – phonemes are the small units of sound that make up language o Phonics – how letters are linked to sounds and their use in reading and spelling o Fluency – the ability to read orally with accuracy, speed and proper expression o Comprehension – the ability to understand and construct meaning from text o Computer technology and reading.
Instructional Techniques/ Teacher Training	**Phonemic awareness techniques:** o Children should be taught to manipulate phonemes with letters, in small groups and with explicit and systematic instruction. **Phonics techniques:** o Phonics can be taught through five instructional approaches: analogy phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, phonics through spelling and synthetic phonics. o Synthetic phonics has been shown to have the greatest positive impact on poor readers. **Fluency techniques:** o Guided repeated oral reading should be used in the classroom, with both the teacher and peers offering feedback and encouragement. **Vocabulary techniques:** o Vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly. o Vocabulary should be presented by repetition, in different contexts and incidental learning. o Computers were more effective than traditional methods at delivering vocabulary instruction. **Text comprehension techniques:** o Students should be taught strategies such as cooperative learning, answering teacher-posed questions and receiving feedback, generating questions about the story and summarizing. **Teacher training:** o Teachers should facilitate discussions in which students derive deeper meaning of text. o Professional development significantly influences student achievement, although more research is needed on the best delivery, frequency and implementation.
Organization/ Roles	**Teachers:** Should become skillful in delivering reading instruction, provide systematic and explicit instruction in all areas of reading, and regularly assess students to assure progress. **Teacher preparation programs:** The National Reading Panel did not find enough valid studies to draw specific conclusions about preservice education content and called for continued research. **District/schools:** Professional development resulted in higher student achievement and had positive effects on teaching.
Policy Implications	1. State and local governing agencies should develop curriculum standards that include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension and writing. 2. Computer technology to support reading instruction holds promise, but research is needed. 3. Teacher preparation programs and staff development should focus on phonetic awareness techniques, fluency techniques, vocabulary techniques and computer applications. 4. Professional development should be a primary focus of policymakers.

IDAHO FOCUSES ON ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Marilyn Howard

In 1997, Idaho's Legislature commissioned a study of reading education. Findings suggested that up to 40% of the state's 4th graders were reading "below grade level."

Over the next two years, a coalition of legislators and educators developed a plan to improve the skills of Idaho's youngest readers through a three-pronged program of assessments, interventions and professional development. Although still young, the Idaho Reading Initiative is proving effective: scores are up, public interest is high, and a surprising number of public and private organizations have adopted reading projects to complement what schools are doing.



"Idaho has begun to think of itself as the 'Reading State.'"

Unique qualities

Other states have similar programs, but the Idaho Reading Initiative has some important elements that, in combination, make it unique:

- **Twice-yearly 10-minute reading "indicators" give teachers consistent information about each child's reading skill level.** The assessments, offered in both English and Spanish to K-3 students, measure each child against a predetermined grade-level standard. Students are scored at, near or below grade level. The assessments are given in the fall and mid-winter to ensure struggling readers still have four months of instruction ahead if they are still below grade level after the second round.
- **Students in the lowest quartile are offered a 40-hour extended program.** Participation is voluntary, and, depending on the district, the extra hours are offered
- **Both inservice and preservice teachers must demonstrate competency in teaching reading.** Inservice teachers must take a three-credit course (paid for by the state) based on Idaho's Comprehensive Literacy Plan, an analysis of the reading skills and interventions expected at each grade level. Effective this September, preservice teachers must pass an assessment of reading teaching competency to be eligible for certification.
- **Scores are disaggregated by sex, ethnicity and economic status.** Scores reported by school, district and state (available on the Web at ww.sde.state.id.us/instruct/reading.htm) also are used to pinpoint problem areas. When last fall's scores showed an unanticipated drop between 1st and 2nd grades, the State Department of Education offered a series of "First-Grade Reading Academies" to review grade-appropriate teaching strategies.
- **The legislature established goals for the program and provided financial support.** Appropriated funds covered costs of the extended-year program, including transportation, teacher training, test development and testing, and materials that sent a strong message – improving reading skills was an important state priority.

As of the last assessment in January 2002, 58% of 3rd graders are reading at grade level, and another 19% are "near" grade level, signaling teachers that these children need more attention for the rest of the school year.

Just as important, libraries, civic clubs, churches, school volunteers and other organizations are offering tutoring, book-buying and reading programs to encourage youngsters to read. Idaho has begun to think of itself as the "Reading State," and we are optimistic that our investment will pay dividends in future education success.

Howard is Idaho superintendent of public instruction and an ECS commissioner.

ALABAMA PROGRAM COMBINES RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

By Katherine Mitchell and Caroline Novak

From the outside, West Blocton Elementary School in Alabama's Bibb County looks like any other rural school. But step inside and expectations change.

The brightly colored walls are covered with student work. Books hang in pockets on the walls, and stacks of books sit on every table. A bulletin board boasts stories written and edited by 1st graders. The concerted effort of children and teachers is obvious.

West Blocton is involved in the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), a K-12 comprehensive strategy that brings the best research on reading instruction and the best teaching practices to classrooms. The majority of the students at West Blocton are on free or reduced-price lunch. Yet, since their involvement in the ARI, special education referrals have declined from 50 to 15, and 62.5% of the school's struggling readers improved to grade level or above in one year.

Attack on three fronts

ARI, with a goal of 100% literacy, targets reading on three fronts: strengthening reading instruction in the early grades, expanding all students' reading and comprehension levels, and intervening with struggling readers. The initiative was launched in 1998 by the State Board of Education in response to data indicating that one in five students was behind grade level in reading.

Teachers and teacher educators helped develop the initiative, and private funds launched the program's early years. Results in pilot sites and the enthusiasm displayed by the principals, faculty, parents and students quickly got policymakers' attention. ARI now enjoys strong bipartisan support from all levels of government and is primarily underwritten by the state. Today, 424 elementary, middle and high schools – almost one-third of Alabama schools – are ARI sites.

Whole-school change

ARI fosters whole-school change. At least 85% of a school's faculty and the principal participate in an intensive two-week summer session, taught by certified presenters.

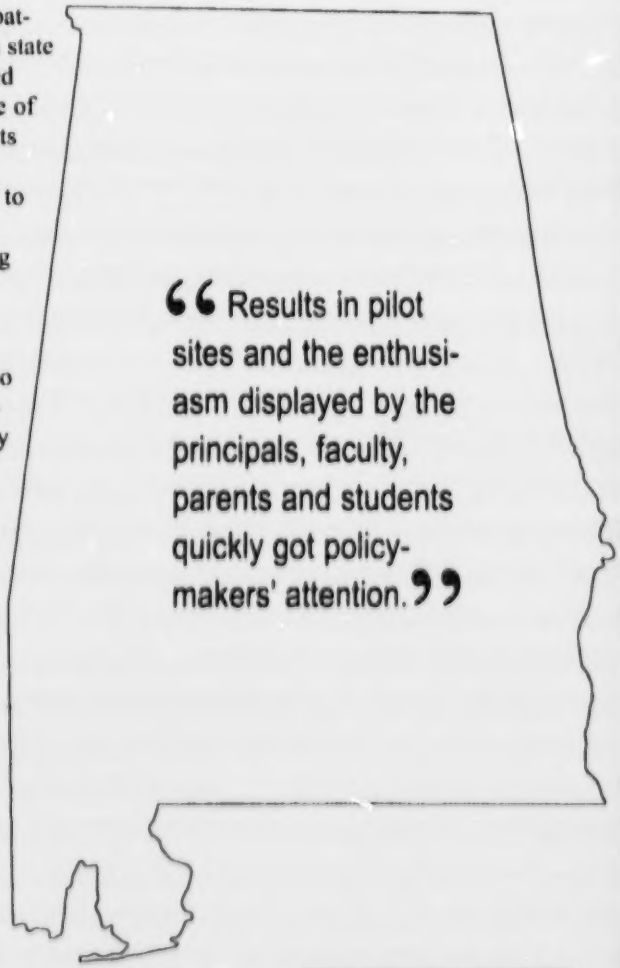
At school, teachers work to continue their learning. Reading specialists work with struggling readers and with teachers to analyze individual reading needs and develop instructional strategies. Reading specialists receive advanced training and participate in monthly meetings to deepen their knowledge and skills.

ARI emphasizes five research-based components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency, explicit comprehension instruction, and language and vocabulary development. In addition, small-group instruction helps teachers meet individual needs and assist struggling readers. Frequent assessments provide diagnosis and help for struggling readers.

External evaluations after each of the first three years found that students in ARI schools made greater gains than students in nonparticipating schools. Now with state staff, a regionally based delivery system, a core of enthusiastic participants and a host of lessons learned, ARI is poised to help every Alabama school improve reading instruction.

ARI focuses on building educators' knowledge and skills to provide effective reading instruction to every student. One teacher recently told an outside evaluator, "We are making massive changes in the way we teach reading and massive changes in the lives of our students. We're creating lifetime readers."

Mitchell directs the Alabama Reading Initiative, and Novak is president of A+ Education Initiative.


"Results in pilot sites and the enthusiasm displayed by the principals, faculty, parents and students quickly got policymakers' attention."

TEXAS FOCUSES ON RESEARCH, ASSESSMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Shirley Dickson

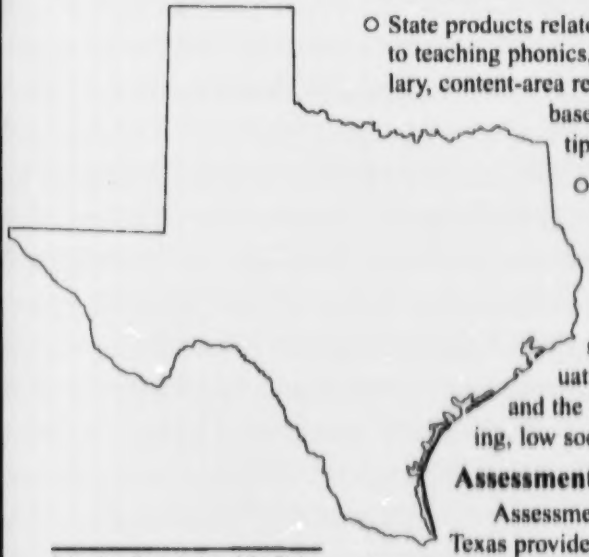
The Texas Reading Initiative (TRI) began in 1996 in a collaboration among the governor, state legislature and Texas Education Agency. Its goal is that all students read at or above grade level by the end of 3rd grade and continue to read at or above level throughout their schooling. Components include comprehensive research-based instruction, assessment and professional development for teachers and administrators. Within each of these areas, TRI aligns with other state education programs.

Research

Comprehensive research-based instruction plays a strong role in TRI:

- The program aligns with the state reading curriculum (the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills [TEKS]), which contains the critical components of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension.
- For K-2 students at risk for reading difficulties, TRI provides state funds to help every school district provide immediate, more intensive, targeted instruction based on scientific research.
- State-funded professional development in reading focuses on research-based instruction.
- State products related to reading (e.g., guides to teaching phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, content-area reading instruction) are based on evidence from multiple research studies.
- Additional state-funded grants include comprehensive research-based reading instruction.
- Finally, Texas sponsors studies such as evaluating the reading program and the features of high-achieving, low socioeconomic schools.

> "Components include comprehensive research-based instruction, assessment and professional development."



Assessment

Assessment is also critical to TRI. Texas provides school districts with diagnostic assessment tools, including one in Spanish, to identify K-2 students at risk for reading difficulties and to guide reading instruction. More than 90% of the districts use the Texas Primary Reading Inventory, a tool with strong validity and high reliability for identifying students at risk for reading difficulties.

In addition, teachers who attend the state-funded professional development programs learn grade-appropriate progress monitoring tools to guide instruction. The diagnostic and progress monitoring tools are in addition to the year-end statewide assessment.

Professional development

A third component of TRI is professional development. State-funded professional development is available for K-12 administrators and teachers, including K-3 teachers, special educators and teachers of students with dyslexia, English Language Learners and struggling secondary readers. In grades K-3, the focus is on preventing reading difficulties. For other grades, the target is bringing struggling readers to grade level.

Professional development for administrators focuses on research-based administrative practices to improve reading achievement. Topics include curriculum alignment, ongoing assessment, differentiated instruction, research-based instruction, focused professional development and use of year-end assessment data.

For preservice educators, the state and several universities collaborate to align reading methods courses with research, the TRI, the reading academies and the TEKS.

The Master Reading Teacher program provides additional state-funded professional development. The state provides a $5,000 annual stipend to Master Reading Teachers who serve on high-needs campuses. In addition to teaching reading, these specialists mentor teachers who want to improve their reading instruction or need help in meeting the needs of struggling readers. Master Reading Teacher certification is based on the TEKS, research-based reading instruction and effective collaboration/consultation practices.

Dickson is an ECS program director in charge of literacy and former director of statewide curriculum initiatives, Division of Curriculum and Professional Development, Texas Education Agency.

TEACHING BEGINNING READING: ONE TEACHER'S VIEW

Regardless of your philosophy on the teaching of reading, or what program you use in the classroom, the goal of every primary school teacher is for his or her students to become fluent readers. As an inner-city classroom teacher in one of the largest urban school districts in the nation for the past 14 years, it has been my job to teach students from preschool to 2nd grade how to read.

Working with low-performing students as a Reading Recovery teacher and earning a master's degree in teaching reading and language arts, I have found that no matter what strategies or skills are taught, the most important factor in learning how to read is the students' ability to make sense of what they are learning. Through high-interest literature, teacher modeling, student practice, interactions with peers and rich opportunities to apply what they have learned, students begin to comprehend the complex process of reading.

Structured program

In an effort to provide more consistent teaching, my district is using a structured reading program from the state's adoption list. The measure was deemed necessary because 25% of the teachers in the district are teaching without a teaching credential, and this program provides an explicit step-by-step design for delivering reading instruction. Components of beginning reading are addressed in daily lessons and practiced throughout the year. Literacy coaches ensure all lessons are taught to all the children within given timeframes.

Although this reading program may sound like the solution to teaching reading in California, we must keep in mind that no one program or method will meet the needs of all students. Research by William Sanders has found that teacher effectiveness is the single most important factor in ensuring the academic success of students. All students do better when taught by a well-qualified teacher.

Teacher effectiveness critical

Programs are important, but they are just the starting point for good teaching. A good reading teacher has an extensive repertoire and does more than what is written in the teachers' guide. New teachers must be given the opportunity to hone their skills and acquire a variety of strategies so they can become effective reading teachers and reach all children. Effective teachers use their knowledge of the individual students in their classroom and modify the program to assure that learning occurs. This experience needs to be valued, and teachers must be given the flexibility to meet the needs of their students.

By Jane Ching Fung

As an experienced reading teacher, I know that no one program is going to meet the needs of all my students. Teaching reading is not something I learned solely from reading a teacher's guide. It is a skill acquired through continuous evaluation, reflection, research and collaboration with others, so that I can best meet the needs of the students I serve. If our goal is for all students to become fluent readers, we need to focus our efforts on empowering teachers to deliver appropriate instruction.

Fung is a K-1 teacher and Network Policy Institute MetLife Fellow with the Los Angeles Unified School District.

> "...the most important factor in learning how to read is the students' ability to make sense of what they are learning."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2000 PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a new system of international assessments that focus on 15-year-olds' capabilities in reading, mathematics and science literacy. PISA also measures general or cross-curricular competencies such as learning strategies. In its first cycle, PISA 2000, reading literacy was the major focus, occupying roughly two-thirds of assessment time.

PISA measures how well 15-year-olds are able to apply different reading processes to a wide range of reading materials, such as the kinds of forms they receive from their governments, the kinds of articles they read in their local newspapers, the kinds of manuals they read for work or school, or the kinds of books or magazines they read for entertainment

PISA scores are reported on a scale of 0 to 1,000, with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100. Most scores fall between 200 and 800. The three specific reading processes on which PISA 2000 reports are:

- **Retrieving information** – the ability to locate one or more pieces of information in a text
- **Interpreting texts** – the ability to understand and draw inferences from one or more parts of a text
- **Reflecting on texts** – the ability to relate a text to one's own experience, knowledge and ideas.

Results (excerpts)

- On the combined reading literacy scale for PISA 2000, U.S. 15-year-olds performed about as well as 15-year-olds in most of the 27 participating Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Students in Canada, Finland and New Zealand outperformed U.S. students, who performed at the same level as students in 19 other participating OECD countries and Liechtenstein. U.S. students did better on average than students from the OECD nations of Greece, Luxembourg, Mexico and Portugal.
- For each of the three specific reading process subscales, retrieving information, interpreting texts and reflecting on texts, U.S. scores did not differ from the OECD averages. Canada and Finland outscored the United States on each of the three reading process

subscales, and the United States outscored at least seven other nations on each measure.

- The top 10% of OECD students scored 623 or higher on the combined reading literacy scale. In the United States, 13% of students achieved this score or better. Three countries (Canada, Finland and New Zealand) had a higher percentage of students score in the top 10%, while 14 countries had a lower percentage.

Reading literacy levels

PISA uses five levels to describe student performance in reading literacy. To reach a particular level, a student must be able to answer correctly a majority of the items at that level.

In the United States, 12% of 15-year-olds read at level 5, the highest proficiency level, one percentage higher than the OECD average. Level 1 encompasses 12% of students, and 6% of U.S. 15-year-olds are below level 1.

Looking at the cumulative percentages of students from level to level on the combined reading literacy scale, about one-third of U.S. students perform at the two highest levels, levels 4 and 5. About 60% of students in the United States perform at level 3 or above, and over 80% percent at level 2 or above.

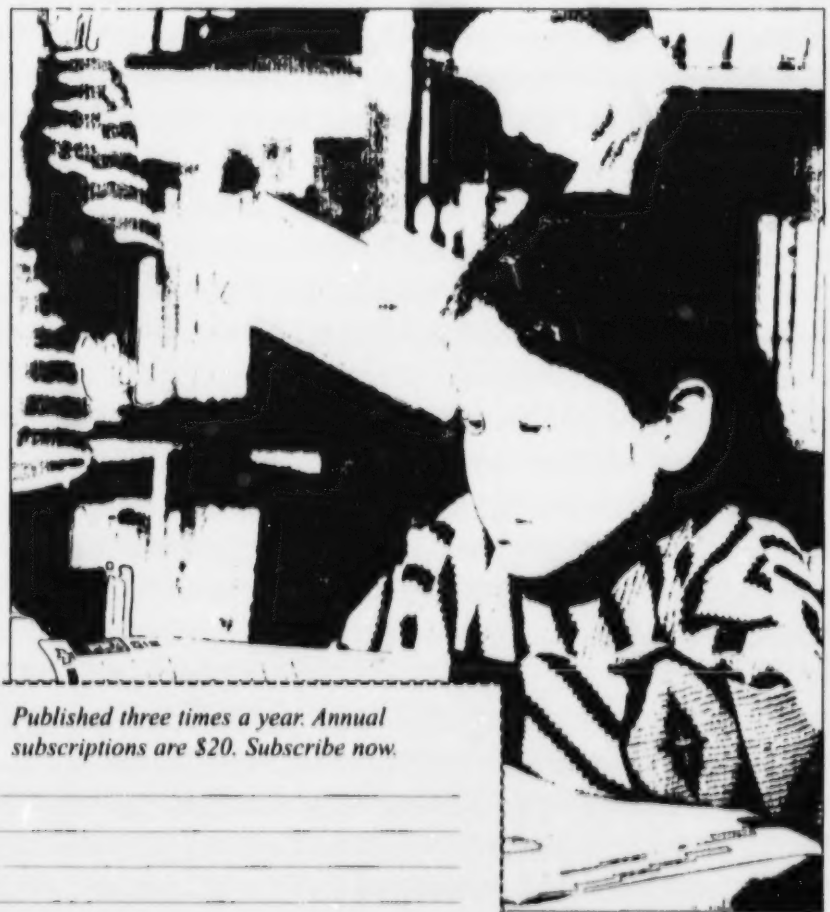
Student attitudes

Student questionnaire items sought information in two major areas: student attitudes toward reading and learning strategies.

- Thirty percent of U.S. 15-year-olds agree or strongly agree that reading is a favorite hobby, compared to a high of 62% of students in Mexico and a low of 24% in Norway.
- In every country, females more than males say reading is a favorite hobby. Thirty-seven percent of females in the United States agree reading is a favorite hobby, compared to 22% of males.
- About half of U.S. 15-year-olds report trying to memorize as much as possible often or always when studying, a higher percentage than the OECD average.

Readers may access the Highlights document at http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/2000highlights.asp or the full report at http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002116.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Highlights from the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment *(PISA), NCES 2002.*



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NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: ECS PUBLICATIONS

The U.S. Congress recently approved, and President Bush signed, an extension and revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This legislation makes significant changes in the nature of the federal government's support of education and, overall, mirrors many of the approaches state policymakers are taking to improve the condition of education in the states.

ECS has the following publications available:

- ***No State Left Behind: The Challenges and Opportunities of ESEA 2001*** (GP-02-01SEL, $12.50) summarizes the new ESEA, looks at states' readiness to implement provisions of the law and provides key questions for policymakers to consider.
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